

FAQs

How did King County acquire the Eastside Rail Corridor?

In 2003, BNSF announced that it planned to sell the rail lines between Snohomish and Renton and from Woodinville to Redmond. These rail lines run along one of the only unbroken north-south strips of land on the Eastside. For many years, people have eyed this corridor to meet our growing transportation needs.

When BNSF announced its intent to sell, King County began working with the Port of Seattle, cities, and agencies to purchase the corridor. Ultimately, the Port of Seattle purchased the Eastside Rail Corridor (ERC) from BNSF in 2009, and then sold interests to King County and other agencies and cities.

King County purchased a trail easement—or right to construct a trail over portions of the ERC—and agreed to become the interim trail sponsor. As a trail sponsor, King County is responsible for planning and operating a trail along 15.6 miles of the corridor between Woodinville and Renton, and from Woodinville south to the Redmond city limits.

I've heard the ERC is a “railbanked” corridor. What does railbanked mean?

Railbanking is a way of both creating a trail and preserving a rail corridor that would otherwise be sold or abandoned. In 1983, our country's rail network was in steep decline as railroad companies abandoned thousands of miles of railroad. Fearing that the public could lose the potential opportunity to use these valuable corridors for future transportation needs, Congress amended the National Trails System Act to create the railbanking program.

As the interim trail sponsor under the National Trails System Act, and under the terms of its trail-use agreement with

BNSF, King County is authorized to use the ERC for trail purposes on an interim basis. Note that the term, “interim” is a technical one: as long as King County designs the trail to so it can co-exist safely with freight rail, trail use can continue indefinitely, even if freight rail returns to the ERC in the future.

Will trains ever use the corridor again?

From the time it decided to purchase the ERC, King County has intended for it to serve multiple uses, including pedestrian, bicycle, and passenger rail, as well as to provide a corridor for utilities.

The ERC is “railbanked” under the National Trails System Act, which means that interstate freight rail service could be restored in the future, if approved by the federal Surface Transportation Board. As long as the ERC trail is capable of co-existing with freight rail, trail use can continue, even if freight rail service is reactivated.

In the near term, light rail trains will operate on the ERC as soon as 2023. Sound Transit owns a 1.1 mile segment in Bellevue, where the East Link Light Rail Station will be located. Sound Transit will also use a portion of the ERC for its Hospital Station in Bellevue, east of I-405.

On December 18, 2014 the Sound Transit Board updated the regional transit Long-Range Plan, which is the vision for how our transit system should grow after voter-approved projects are completed in 2023. The [updated plan](#), shaped by more than 24,000 survey responses and public comments, will determine how future expansions should occur.

For more information regarding East Link, Hospital Station, and Sound Transit’s long range plan, please visit www.soundtransit.org/Projects-and-Plans/Long-range-Plan-update or call 206-903-7000.

Who else purchased portions of the Eastside Rail Corridor?

Railroad companies established the ERC in the late 19th century, and BNSF ultimately assumed ownership of the corridor. After the ERC was railbanked and bought by the Port of Seattle in 2009, the Port sold interests to Puget Sound Energy (PSE), Sound Transit, the City of Redmond, the City of Kirkland, and King County.. The City of Woodinville and Snohomish County also intend to acquire a portion of the ERC.

These organizations bought two basic types of interests in the ERC. Some of the new owners bought all of BNSF's former rights and interests in parts of the ERC. When an organization owns all of the interests in the property, it enjoys all of the same property rights and responsibilities as BNSF did. This [map](#) shows all of the property owners in the ERC.

Other new owners bought limited-purpose easements in the corridor. When an organization buys an easement, it does not own the underlying land, but it does own a specific right to do something with the land, such as operate a trail, utilities, or high-capacity transit. This map shows all of the major easement holders in the ERC.

Freight rail continues to operate from Snohomish to Woodinville.

What does the county intend to do with the rail corridor?

After voters approved the Parks Levy in 2013, King County Parks started a master planning process for a regional trail. In May 2014, surveyors, engineers, landscape architects, and trail planners began a detailed inventory and analysis of the entire county-owned portion of the railbanked corridor from Woodinville to Renton. This work will inform future trail design and development. King County anticipates adopting a final master plan in 2016.

In addition, King County and others with interests in the rail corridor (Kirkland, Redmond, Sound Transit, and PSE) are working together through the ERC Regional Advisory Council to collaborate and plan for multiple uses of the railbanked corridor.

Will the county remove the railroad tracks?

As the master planning process moves forward, the King County project team will address the issue of whether to recommend removing the railroad tracks. Before any rails could be removed, however, the King County Council would need to approve the removal.

Is it possible to have a trail and an active railroad share space? How?

Rails with trails are more common than ever. There are 161 rails *with* trails in 41 states, a 260 percent increase since 2000. It also appears that rails with trails are safe: of the thousands of fatalities that have occurred on active railroad corridors in recent decades, only one involved a user on a rail with trail. A well-designed pathway can provide a safe transportation alternative to surface streets and reduce the likelihood of people trespassing on the railroad tracks or using the tracks as a shortcut.

Puget Sound Energy studied a route for new electric transmission lines along a section of the Eastside Rail Corridor. Does Puget Sound Energy have the authority to install new lines in the corridor?

In 2010, PSE purchased an easement to use the ERC for electric and natural gas utilities. In 2014, PSE studied alternative routes for new electric transmission lines, one which was a north-south route that would have included segments of the ERC between Bellevue and Renton. Based on community input, PSE has narrowed the alternatives to

two that do not include the ERC. That being said, PSE retains the right to use the ERC for electric and natural gas utilities in the future.

For more information about the Energize Eastside project, visit the project website at www.energizeeastside.com.

May Creek, Coal Creek, and other small streams cross the ERC at different locations. How will you protect them?

King County's project team worked throughout summer 2014 to map locations of streams, wetlands, and other critical areas in the corridor. The project team will use this information to develop a trail plan that avoids or minimizes impacts to these sensitive areas.

How can I get involved in the trail master planning process?

Public input is essential to a successful project. King County is committed to reaching out to the community during the trail master planning process.

In 2014, the project team collected information about the corridor and the feasibility of connecting ERC to other trails and key destinations. Public outreach has begun and the team is preparing a variety of meetings, events, and open houses to take place in 2015 and 2016. These meetings are intended to keep the public updated and gather feedback on the master planning process.

If you have questions or concerns about trail master planning, or want to be notified of any meetings or developments, contact us at (855) 216-9461 or ERCtrail@kingcounty.gov. You can also visit our website at www.kingcounty.gov/parks/eastsiderailcorridor to find out more about the project.